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ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

MRS. HARRIET ANN WILLIAMSON JOHNSON

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ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

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November 28, 1972	November 28, 1972
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*Note: Mrs. Annette S. Morse (Interviewer) is the niece of Mrs. Harriet Ann Williamson Johnson (Interviewee).

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INTERVIEWEE: Mrs. Harriet Ann Williamson Johnson

INTERVIEWERS: Sue Morse and Anna Krakar

KRAKAR: This is an interview with Mrs. Harriet Ann Williamson Johnson for the Joliet Junior College Oral History Program by Sue Morse and Anna Krakar at 110 East Chapin Street, Morris, Illinois, on November 28, 1972 at 7:00 p.m.

MORSE: I will start by asking you to tell me a little bit about your family, how they happened to come to Illinois.

JOHNSON: I am Mrs. Harriet Ann Johnson. You have been asking me to tell you about what I can remember about my grandparents, my parents and my early life. My grandparents, all of them, were English people and they came to the United States from England. My grandfather William Williamson was a hoisting engineer; there were many coal mines in England, and he must have thought that he could do better for his family by taking the voyage to the United States. He came early in the year of 1866. Grandma didn't get to come with him, because she had a little boy three years of age and was expecting a new baby. She went to live with her parents. The new baby, who was my father, was named Harry. When he was six months of age, she decided that she was strong enough to make the voyage to America to be with Grandfather. In those days, such a voyage required several weeks on the ocean, and each family on the boat was required to bring provisions for themselves that would last for the trip. I remember very well seeing the tall brown crock with a lid on it that grandmother said she had filled with butter to use on the trip. When Grandfather arrived here he found employment in Dubuque, Iowa, in a machine shop. He wasn't happy with that, so after Grandmother arrived, they came to Braidwood, a coal mining town, in Will

County, Illinois. He was hired at one of the coal mines. The mines in Braidwood were named after the letters of the alphabet. The mine where grandfather was employed was "I" mine. When my father was sixteen years of age, the coal company decided that they wanted to build a new engine room. It wasn't built as it should have been because when the scaffolding was removed the structure collapsed. Grandfather was buried under this debris and that is how and when he lost his life. That left grandmother a widow with six sons. Uncle William, the eldest, was nineteen, and next was my father who was sixteen. The other four boys, I don't remember their ages. She wondered how she could support herself and those young children. Her parents in England made a hard candy that was peppermint flavored. There has always been so much hard candy made in England. Grandmother knew how to make that candy, so she thought, well, now, she might have some success in making and selling it, making it in the home and then she would be able to keep her children together. The entire community, especially the businessmen, had so much sympathy for grandmother and the plight she was in. She began to make candy and the grocers let her place it in their stores. It went over big. It became very popular. Those businessmen suggested that she have her candy patented. They told her that they would help her to accomplish that, which they did. Well, if it was going to patented it had to have a name and a trademark. She was then living near G-Shaft so these men suggested that a picture be taken of the Shaft and the a capital letter of the alphabet "G," be used. The trademark was made and set up that way, with a large printed G in one corner and then a picture of the Shaft. Grandmother continued to make that candy for many years. In fact, she hardly discontinued making it before she died in 1914. There was a time when the youngest son married and left home that she was left alone. She

decided that she would sell the home. She went and lived part of the time at my Uncle Alfred's and part of the time with us. But she wasn't happy. So she went to Braidwood and rented a vacant building on Main Street, part of it had been where a drug store was located and the other part was Dr. Eldred's offices. She made her apartment in the Dr.'s office and manufactured the candy in the big part, which had been a drug store. My Uncle Alfred died suddenly, a very young man, 40 years of age, and my Aunt was left a widow with eight children in much the same circumstances as my grandmother had been left. She helped my grandmother to make the candy and, in that way, she could help to support her children. When Grandmother died, I went to Braidwood and my Aunt and I made the candy and sold it. We were partners in it for two years, one year in that building and then we decided to go to a smaller building where Aunt and I made the candy. She went home in the evening to her children on the farm just north of Braidwood. My brother, William, was then ready to attend high school. My family lived on the farm so he came and lived with me and attended high school in Braidwood, which was good for both of us. Then my Aunt married again, and we moved the candy shop to Coal City. My mother drove in from the farm and we made the candy together. When I was going to be married, my family had moved to Minooka. In the home they had there, my mother and brothers began manufacturing the G-Shaft candy. I was married and my husband and I went to live in Chicago. I lived there for the next 51 years, until I moved to Morris, Illinois in 1969.

MORSE: Could you tell me how long the G-Shaft was made.

JOHNSON: My family continued the manufacture of G-Shaft in Minooka until in the 1940's, then time, which brought change and death, caused them to decide to discontinue the manufacture of the candy.

KRAKAR: Was the recipe passed down to anyone to make in their own homes?

JOHNSON: At the time of grandmother's death, she left a Will in which she willed the right of manufacture to my father. There are imitations of it made now, but it can't legally be called G-Shaft.[1]

MORSE: There is no one left to fight a legal battle for the name. Grandmother never sold the right to manufacture?

JOHNSON: No, no.

MORSE: This has been written in the Grundy County History Book that she sold the right to manufacture...

JOHNSON: Absolutely not. When she passed away in 1914 in her Will she left the right of manufacture of G-Shaft Candy to my father, Harry Williamson.

KRAKAR: Then did he and his family make it then for the next few years?

JOHNSON: Well, I have already told you that about making it and then when I was married, you know.

KRAKAR: Oh, I see, I didn't get the connection in years.

JOHNSON: Mother and Harry and Ralph were making G-Shaft. The oldest and

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1. Please refer to the xerox copy of the label under which the candy was marketed and a copy of the patent. These two exhibits prove that the candy was patented, which refutes a comment by Maurice R. Marchello in Black Coal for White Bread published by Vantage Press. This label and the text of this interview will also correct the misinformation by Helen Stine Ullrich in This is Grundy County published by the Grundy County Board of Supervisors. Mrs. Ullrich erroneously states that great-grandfather William Williamson was killed in G-Shaft instead of I-Shaft, and she further states "... when the demand became greater than her ability to produce she sold the formula and her interests to a commercial candy maker." Only distribution rights were granted to a Chicago distributor as can be seen by the label, the only label under which the candy was ever sold by the Williamson family. This also refutes M. J. Donna, author of the Braidwood Story.

the youngest sons were the last to make it, they were making it together, Harry and Ralph were making it at the time Ralph was killed, June 5, 1942 in the arsenal explosion near Elwood, Illinois in which 68 men lost their lives.

MORSE: And that was the end of it. That was the beginning of World War II and sugar was hard to get and there was little profit in it.

JOHNSON: Yes. It was a seasonal candy. It was what is called a pure candy. There wasn't any perservatives in it so it could only be manufactured from late in November until March. That was a disadvantage to somebody who had to find employment in those other months of the year.

MORSE: Why was it seasonal? Because of no perservatives?

JOHNSON: Because there were no perservatives in it, it crysyalized.

KRAKAR: Oh, I see. In damp weather?

JOHNSON: Yes, yes.

MORSE: I remember Mother didn't make it on humid days. (laugh)

KRAKAR: Could we go back and pick up where you were born, the time?

JOHNSON: Well, my father, when he grew to manhood, followed in his father's footsteps and became a hoisting engineer. I will tell you about deep coal mining so that you will understand what hoisting meant. My father and mother, my father, Harry Williamson, and my mother, Martha Alde Melbourn, were married in Braidwood, December 19, 1888. My older sister was born January 19, 1890. I was born July 12, 1892. When a coal mine was what they termed, "worked out," it was abandoned. The engineer and the miners would be hired to work in a new mine. There were several mines around Braidwood. Father worked in a mine in Godley and another in Eureka; and then in the spring of 1896, we moved to Coal Branch Junction. That is an area that is now called Eileen, which is a Village north and east of Coal City. He was hired as the hoisting

engineer at the Big 4 Coal Company Mine. It was within walking distance of our home, and our home was across the road from the Big 4 Company farm. You may wonder what connection there was between a farm and a coal mine. Mules were used down in the mine. I have been down in the mine. My father was stationed in the engine room. I remember seeing that large stationary engine and how shiny it was. The wheels revolved just like those on a big railroad locomotive engine. In that engine room the floor was made of hard wood; the engineers kept it scrubbed so white that you would almost hesitate to step on it for fear your foot tracks would show. There was a connection between the engine room and the coal pit. Everything was taken into that coal mine on a large--we would now call it an elevator--it was called a cage. The miners, the mules, in fact everything that was used in the mine was taken down on that cage. You can know it was large when it held men or mules or cars of coal. That is where the title "hoisting engineer" comes in. My father, by getting a signal with the power from that stationary engine that I have described to you, hoisted everything up from the mine below on that cage. As the miners dug the coal, they had to shore the walls and the ceiling with timbers so that the earth would not cave in on them. You have read of mine disasters. They wore pit lamps on their caps. I don't know what the fuel was that those wicks were saturated with.

KRAKAR: On their hats?

JOHNSON: Pit lamps on their caps. That kept the light right where they needed it as they worked. You have seen these salamanders that are put on the highway if there is an accident or something? Those pit lamps showed a constant light just like a salamander would. That is what furnished the light for the miners to work. They had certain sized cars down there; and as they mined the coal, they filled it into these cars. The

mules pulled the cars to the opening where the cage was, and then the men put the cars of coal on the cage. My father got the signal, and then he hoisted the cage to the surface where it was met by other men and mules, and taken off the cage. I don't know what was done to the coal before it was put on what is called flatcars, railroad cars. The coal was put on them; and when a car was filled, it was put on a siding. When they had a number of cars filled, they were attached to a locomotive and taken on the switch track to the main railroad where it was shipped away. Well, I will tell you now about the farm. Those mules had to be fed, watered and cared for.

KRAKAR: Sure.

JOHNSON: They had many mules on that company farm; some were used in the mine, some were used on the surface. Then after the mules were used in the mine for a certain length of time, they were put to pasture for a rest. Other mules replaced them in the mine.

MORSE: Who took care of the mules?

JOHNSON: Mr. Matthew Keevers. Two of his daughters reside in Coal City now. He was the farm manager. I really couldn't truthfully tell you how many mules they had at the farm to use, because they also did work around the farm as well as at the mine. They had a great number of them. Later my father worked at a mine in South Wilmington and one in Carbon Hill. The mines around Coal City were numbered, instead of lettered like the Braidwood mines were. I think it was Number 2 Mine near Carbon Hill where my father worked. I have to go back to our family living at Coal Branch Junction. When I was old enough to go to school, I walked with my sister, Alice, up the railroad tracks more than a mile to attend school--Suffernville School.

KRAKAR: Suffernville School?

JOHNSON: Suffernville School. It was a school with many rooms and eight grades. In each room there were two classes, a B class and an A class. Each child first went into the B class, and then the A class, before going into a higher grade. I remember when President William McKinley was assassinated. I think it was in 1902. The day that he was to be buried, we didn't have class as usual. At the hour that his funeral service was being held, each pupil in the entire school was given two pieces of ribbon, one black and one white, and a pin. We pinned that ribbon on us like a boutonniere. Then we filed out of the school to the gravel walk along the school yard, and each teacher had her pupils follow her. When we were all standing in order, we began a very slow and solemn march around the whole block in the town of Suffernville. It must have impressed me, (I was about nine years old), because I can visualize it right now, just as it was then. Another thing that I remember before I was of school age--we wore high topped button shoes. There were so many buttons and buttonholes, and they were set so close together. When, oh I may have been about four years, my mother had another new baby--which was number four of her family of ten--she thought it was time that I learn how to button my own shoes. I sat on the kitchen floor with a button hook. I had such a struggle trying to pull each button into the right buttonhole. If I didn't get it right when I reached the top, it was uneven and I had to do it all over again.

KRAKAR: I can just see that. /Laughter/

JOHNSON: I am telling you, I hope that all people don't think children have such a free life. I would not wish or say, "turn backwards, turn backwards, oh time in your flight, make me a child again just for tonight."

KRAKAR: It doesn't work that way!

JOHNSON: Oh, a child's problems are so serious! I have to turn now to

the Melbourn family. Grandfather and grandmother Melbourn were married in England as, of course, my Williamson grandparents were. The Williamsons came from Yorkshire, and Grandpa and Grandma Melbourn came from Lincolnshire. Grandpa was a farmer. I don't know anything about their voyage; but they brought their two eldest sons with them, and eventually they had nine children. They lived in the State of New York for three years. Then they moved to Lockport, Illinois. From there they came and bought a farm in Felix Township, Grundy County, Illinois, which is a few miles north of the town of Coal City, Illinois. They raised their family there. My mother was the youngest of that family. When she was grown and left home, she went to work in Braidwood. Her parents had given her a sewing machine when she was twelve years of age, and she began then to sew. In Braidwood, she was employed in a Mrs. Voight's Dressmaking Shop. I have shown you the photograph of the beautiful wedding dress she made and the poke bonnet that matched it. She and my father were married December 19, 1888. My sister, Alice, was born in January of 1890, and then switching because I am going to repeat part of what I said before, because I was talking about the Williamsons, I now want to talk about my mother's family. Grandmother Melbourn died in 1894, and Grandfather lived until 1901. After Grandmother died, a cousin of mine came to be the housekeeper for grandfather and my bachelor Uncle William. Grandfather died at the age of 85. When his estate was settled, my father bought the farm. That meant that we had to move from Coal Branch Junction. At that time he was working in the mine at Carbon Hill. When we were settled on the farm, we children had to go to a one-room schoolhouse where eight grades were taught in one room, and by one teacher. We also had a long distance to walk to that school.

KRAKAR: Do you remember the name of the school?

JOHNSON: Short School. Instead of walking along railroad tracks, we walked through the pasture and timber.

MORSE: Do you remember the location of that farm?

JOHNSON: Felix Township, as I have said.

KRAKAR: Is that by Dresden?

JOHNSON: Pardon?

MORSE: Is that by Dresden? Who farms it now? Would you happen to know?

JOHNSON: That farm is now nonexistent. It is part of the waste land created by strip mining during later years. We lived in quite a primitive fashion. We didn't have a bathroom, we didn't have running water, but we were not the exception. Others lived just as we did. We used kerosene lamps for light in the house. We used lanterns to make light in the barn and other out buildings. We had a coal burning heating stove in the living room. On the floor we had wall-to-wall carpeting, but it was strips of rag carpet that had been woven and then sewn together to fit the room. The padding we had under it was fresh oat straw. Each summer after the threshers had been there, we took up the carpet, took it out and gave it a good beating, and swept up the old straw from the floor (that was by then pretty well pulverized). We went out to the straw stack and brought in new, nice golden straw and spread it evenly over the floor. Then we reversed the carpet from one side to the other and nailed it down with tacks, all around the wall, and it did for another year.

KRAKAR: Very good.

JOHNSON: In the kitchen we had linoleum on the floor; but in all the other rooms the floors were bare, excepting for single pieces of rag carpet that were placed beside each bed.

MORSE: What were your beds like?

JOHNSON: We had wooden beds with slats and flat springs on top of the slats. We had a, oh, it was tick, you might call it, filled with straw. On top of that we had feather beds. We made our own. Our mother sewed up ticking and we saved feathers to fill the tick. We slept on nice soft feather beds; we also had feather pillows. You wouldn't care to use feather beds today; but you must realize that in those days our bedrooms were very cold, and on those feather beds we could snuggle down and be real comfortable.

MORSE: Did you ever use a feather tick over the top of you as well as underneath?

JOHNSON: No, I have heard that Bohemian people do that but we English people didn't.

MORSE: What kind of quilts did you use then over the top of your feathers?

JOHNSON: Not quilts. Blankets.

KRAKAR: You did?

JOHNSON: Yes. Wool blankets.

MORSE: I remember the bed in Grandmother's house in Minooka, how tall it was. When we were small, we had to use a stepladder, the little stepstool, to get into the bed. And Grandma was so short, that in order to make those beds and fluff out those feather ticks every morning, she had a broom handle and she would beat it all across the bed to smooth out the bumps. Then when she wasn't looking, we would sneak back in. Probably because it was so nice to sink into the feathers.

JOHNSON: One of my daily chores was to clean those kerosene lamps, and to make the wicks even, and wash the chimneys and fill the lamps with kerosene.

MORSE: What did you use to wash them? Homemade soap?

JOHNSON: I was going to tell you about that when I told you about how we did the family laundry out in the other kitchen. Mother did make some of our laundry soap out of grease and lye. The washing was all done by hand on washboards and in wooden tubs. Then the white clothes and bedding, like the sheets and pillow cases, were boiled in a copper wash boiler on the stove.

MORSE: A three-burner kerosene stove?

JOHNSON: No. It was a coal stove. I never knew of my mother ever having a kerosene stove. We always had coal stoves. I can remember hanging the clothes out in the yard on the line, how stiff they were during the winter; they were frozen. After they had become frozen awhile, we went out and brought them in. Then we had something that was called a clothes bar that we put the frozen clothes on, and put this clothes bar around the heating stove in the living room for them to finish drying. We had two pumps; one was down by the barn yard. We pumped all the water for the livestock. The other pump was on the porch just outside the kitchen door; that water we used for cooking and laundry.

KRAKAR: You mentioned another kitchen. You had two kitchens?

JOHNSON: Yes. You see, some people had kitchens that were not very well built. They were plastered inside and insulated. They called those shanty kitchens. We had a large outside kitchen that was plastered. It was a kitchen that was attached to the other side of the porch opposite the main part of the house. We did all our cooking and canning out there during the summer. We really lived mostly on the food that we raised. We had an abundance of fruit, apples, cherries and peaches. We had berries, blackberries, red and black raspberries, red currants, black currants, gooseberries. We canned those. Our cellar had so much fruit in it. When a pig was butchered, we had a big hardwood barrel in the cellar.

The meat was cut up like a professional butcher would cut it; then put into this barrel of brine which would preserve it until we were ready to eat it. We trimmed all the fat off of it and that fat we cut into small pieces and rendered it into lard. That was our lard to make pies, or anything for frying in the frying pan. That is the way we used our lard.

KRAKAR: You mentioned a pump for water. Did that come from like a stream nearby or...?

JOHNSON: No. It was the one by the barnyard that was called an open well. But the one ot the house, it was a drive well. The water was supposed to be pure for us to drink and cook with. The one at the barnyard wasn't pure water. We didn't drink any of that. We made cottage cheese and we churned our own butter.

KRAKAR: You had milking cows then?

JOHNSON: Oh, yes. We had cows that we milked and we strained the fresh milk into big crocks on a table in the cellar, because that was the coolest place we had. By the way, we couldn't have veal or beef because we didn't have refrigeration. We could cure the pork in the salt brine but if we wanted fresh meat we had to get that in town. We raised chickens and turkeys and we ate poultry meat and eggs. My brothers, in winter time, would set traps and catch rabbits, and we would eat rabbit meat.

KRAKAR: Did you farm?

JOHNSON: Oh, yes. Eventually my father quit the mine in Carbon Hill to help my very young brothers do the farming, but he wasn't much of a farmer because naturally he had been a mining engineer all of his life. Yes, and they baled the hay. Some we sold, but it was only the surplus

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of everything we raised that we sold.

MORSE: What was your typical meal like since you cured only pork and you had chickens. Did you eat stews or meat and potatoes like we eat now?

JOHNSON: Our kettles were iron kettles with three little legs on the bottom. In the cook stove we burned corn cobs, and wood, and some coal. It depended on what we were cooking or baking, if we wanted a fast heat or a slow one. The bottom of those kettles would be all covered with soot so we had to hold them on the edge of the dish pan and just wash the inside of them. Every so often we took them out to the ash pile, (these were the ashes that we would remove from our heating stove and our cook stove and put on the ash pile) and we twisted those kettles on the ash pile in the ashes to scour the soot off of them.

MORSE: Some of the early soap was made from ashes.

JOHNSON: What I remember mother using was fat and lye.

MORSE: This was primitive people who used ashes for soap at times.

JOHNSON: We always had so much to do. Not only the adults of the family but the children. We surely didn't have time to get into any mischief or make any trouble because it was home from school, change from our school clothes into old clothes, grab a slice of bread and jelly and out we went to fill up the water tank, go gather the eggs from the chicken coop and go to the garden for fruit or vegetables and into the house and prepare things for the meals. I don't remember that we had a great deal of school work, what is called homework.

MORSE: Did you do much sewing or handy work?

JOHNSON: Well, no. I helped mother with the mending, with a large family like that there was a lot of darning and mending to do. Mother did the patching, I liked to do the darning. When our clothes were

worn beyond patching or darning, that is when they were torn into carpet rags and sewn together, and wound into balls, and then taken to the weaver's to be woven into rag carpet. In the yard we had quite a patch of horseradish. Each spring, when the fresh plants came, we dug horseradish. The roots were similar to parsnips; they were white, and we peeled them, but oh, was that a tedious job. Horseradish is so strong that it brough the tears to our eyes. After peeling it, we put it through the food chopper. Then added vinegar to it and put it into small glass jars to use it. Mother went to town driving the horse and buggy, driving the horse and riding in the buggy. She sold butter and berries, anything that was surplus. She had her customers.

MORSE: How far did you all go through school?

JOHNSON: Eighth grade, seven of the ten of us had high school and three had college.

MORSE: Do you have a brother who is a doctor?

JOHNSON: Yes.

MORSE: So he went through high school?

JOHNSON: Yes.

MORSE: And medical school?

JOHNSON: Yes.

KRAKAR: How far did you have to go to high school?

JOHNSON: Oh, the nearest high school at that time was one in the town of Wilmington, and one here in Morris; but in those horse and buggy days, with rough country roads, we just couldn't attend high school. That is why it meant so much for brother William, who became the doctor, to live with me in Braidwood. When I lived in Coal City and made the G-Shaft, he lived with me there.

MORSE: How did he happen to go to college then?

JOHNSON: He borrowed money to pay his tuition, and also read for blind students to earn money. I know that he finished high school in Coal City by riding horseback. There were two things that brought great changes in our life on the farm. The telephone company. We were so excited when we saw the telephone company putting up poles and stringing wires to bring to us our first telephone service.

MORSE: Do you remember the year?

JOHNSON: I don't remember the year. It was a big crude telephone on the kitchen wall with a crank on the side of it that we turned when we wanted to signal the operator to call a number for us. There two large bells on the top of the box. It was a party line. If the call was for you, then your phone rang once. For another party it rang twice, next three, the next four times. On the line we heard all of those calls, so even when a call wasn't for us, we would listen in like others did when the call was for us. When we would hear the receiver being taken down, we would say, "Now be careful what you say, somebody is rubbering." /Laughter/ That was the way, instead of saying eavesdropping, that was the slang way we had of expressing it.

MORSE: Rubbering?

JOHNSON: Rubbering. Yes. You can imagine how telephone service changed our lives.

MORSE: Were you young at the time, or...

JOHNSON: Yes.

MORSE: Or was it early in your childhood, or as you..

JOHNSON: Well, that I don't remember.

KRAKAR: You were still on the farm then?

JOHNSON: Oh, yes. The next advancement was Rural Mail Delivery. They laid out a route that did not come by our farm. Our mailbox was placed

about a mile away, next to our neighbor's box, because that shortened the route for the mailman. I went for the mail on horseback.

KRAKAR: How did he bring it? Was he on horseback too, or was...

JOHNSON: No, he had a little white painted wagon, oh, it was kind of a boxy affair. I think it was put on a buggy chassis. Hitched to that was a team of horses. He rode over the route six days a week. When my father and mother were married in 1888, and he was, as I told you, a hoisting engineer, he worked twelve-hour shifts, seven days a week and his monthly pay was $56. Believe it or not, that was considered a fine job and very good pay at that time.

MORSE: Well, I have heard of people working for less in those days, but...

JOHNSON: Well,

MORSE: Do you remember leaving Grundy County, when you talked about being here? Did you ever take a train into Chicago, or an electric car? There were electric cars in those days that criss-crossed the county.

JOHNSON: Oh, I went with my grandmother Williamson and a woman friend of hers' and my cousin, Jennie, (she was the daughter of my Uncle Alfred), to Riverview Park. There was some speaker there that Sunday that my grandmother and her friend were interested in. I think it was Eugene V. Debs, the Socialist candidate for President.

KRAKAR: Oh, he was under the Socialist Party, about what year?

JOHNSON: I was somewhere around fifteen years of age then. We went on the C & A train from Braidwood.

MORSE: What kind of a train?

JOHNSON: A locomotive passenger train.

MORSE: Electric or coal? Coal was burned to make the steam.

JOHNSON: No. A steam engine.

MORSE: Was Riverview a park then like we knew it later.

JOHNSON: Yes.

KRAKAR: Did the train go up through Joliet and then on to Chicago?

JOHNSON: Well, it went to Chicago, a nephew of this women friend of my grandmother's met us there. He knew just exactly where to go and how to arrive at the park. We returned on the evening train. My grandmother Williamson was a very proud woman and very particular about how she dressed. She had a dressmaker in Braidwood make her dress; the dress she wore that day was a black dress, it was summer material; it wasn't sheer but it wasn't too heavy. The dress was made with French seams, if you understand what they are. The raw edges are all turned in and poor Grandmother had put that on wrong side out and didn't know it. Cousin Jennie and I sat on one side of the street car and Mrs. Conboy and Grandmother sat on the other. Naturally we looked over at Grandmother; I looked again and then I couldn't believe my eyes, I saw the seams. They were so neat, really, that they weren't noticeable. So I whispered to my cousin. I said, "Look, grandmother had put her dress on wrong side out." We started to giggle. And we giggled and giggled and grandmother said, "What is the matter with you girls? What are you laughing about?" Of course, we didn't dare to tell her. /Laughter/

KRAKAR: So she never changed her dress, she just kept it that way.

JOHNSON: Oh, that was on the evening ride home to Braidwood, that I made the discovery. /Laughter/

MORSE: She never did find out?

JOHNSON: I don't remember if we told her after we arrived at her home, because it was over then and she couldn't do anything about it.

MORSE: Not too many people probably knew her in Chicago anyway.

JOHNSON: Well, no. And it was so neat that it wasn't surprising that it happened. And, of course, it was an early morning train that we went

on and everything was done in haste.

MORSE: Tell us about the first car in the family.

JOHNSON: Well, I don't know too much about it because I was away from home. I was living in Chicago.

MORSE: You were already married?

JOHNSON: Oh, yes.

MORSE: How old were you then when you had your first automobile? You and your husband...?

JOHNSON: Eleanor was born in November of 1923, and she had the colic. It embarrassed us so, when we would ride the train down to Minooka to visit my mother, (the Rock Island Train), I think it was the next spring that we bought the Model T. And years later we had a Ford V-8. We sold that in 1942.

KRAKAR: When was it you were married? What year?

JOHNSON: Oh, I was married April 18, 1918 and as you remember your history, quote, "it was the 18th of April, in '75', hardly a man is now alive who remembers the famous day and year and the midnight ride of Paul Revere."

KRAKAR: /Laughter/ Very good. Did you have a big wedding or what was your wedding like?

JOHNSON: No. We only went to the Methodist parsonage and was married by the parson.

MORSE: Where?

JOHNSON: At the Wicker Park Methodist Parsonage.

KRAKAR: In Braidwood, or...

JOHNSON: No, in Chicago.

KRAKAR: Oh, in Chicago.

MORSE: Where did you meet your husband?

JOHNSON: At my cousins' in Waukegan. He was first a railroad fireman

and when he didn't pass the eye sight test to become a railroad engineer, (which was a great disappointment to him.) He became a stationary engineer.

MORSE: What is a stationary engineer?

JOHNSON: Oh, he worked for the city waterworks in Waukegan and later he attended school in Chicago and became what is known as a refrigeratoring engineer.

MORSE: Where did he work in refrigeration?

JOHNSON: In Chicago.

KRAKAR: Did you live in Waukegan then or did you live in..

JOHNSON: No, we lived in Chicago. We had two children; the elder of the two was Virginia. When she was working on her Masters Degree in chemistry at Northwestern University, she met a young man who was earning his doctorate degree in chemistry. They became engaged and later married. My daughter Eleanor did not marry. She always thought that she would like to be a librarian. After she had bulbar polio, she decided she wanted to be a medical librarian. She began college in Ripon, Wisconsin and then came to the University of Chicago. There she got her bachelor's degree. Later she earned her master's degree and graduated cum laude from the University at Ann Arbor, Michigan. She had much education that was not for a degree. After working in Michigan and the government medical library in Washington, D. C. and the New York Academey of Medicine in New York City, she was hired to be the bio-medical librarian at the University of Chicago. She kept that position until she resigned it because she wanted to go to Viet Nam. She went to Saigon in Viet Nam in 1967 and stayed there for two years. While there she was instrumental in setting up a medical library in Saigon. She, yet, has many Vietnamese friends. One of the little Vietnamese girls who worked for her in the

library in Saigon is now being educated as a medical librarian for a degree in North Carolina. When she gets her Christman vacation, she is going to Tucson, Arizona, and spend her Christmas vacation with Eleanor. Eleanor said that they two had been through the Tet Offensive together, and so much together--shots and shells all about them, Well, you can imagine how I felt back here in Chicago. I was just frantic.

KRAKAR: What about the same thing only back in 1918 when you were married and World War I was going on? Do you remember much about how it affected you and the way you lived?

JOHNSON: Well, yes. My brothers-in-law, my husband's three brothers, were in Europe; and my own brother, Harry Williamson, was in Europe. He was used as a replacement in the 137th Ohio Division. We didn't know until the War was over that he had been at the front for four days; and out of a company of over 200, he was one of the 30-some that came back alive. They had two or four days rest and were all packed up to go to the front again when the word came through that the Armistice had been signed. After it was all over and he could write to us, that was the first we knew that he had been in combat. He said that they were laying on the ground with their rifles, and that he didn't feel comfortable so he moved over a little. There was a sniper someplace that shot, and he said that the bullet just whistled over him. One of the buddies that he had said to him, "Williamson, I'm going over here. You come beside me." And Harry said, "No, I'm going over here." And the same spot where the buddy had said for him to come to was blown up.

MORSE: Had they some other tough times in that was that he came home and told about?

JOHNSON: Oh, yes.

MORSE: Lack of food? He never was completely well after he came home?

JOHNSON: Oh, I'm telling you, this recording is going to be so confused.

MORSE: That's all right.

JOHNSON: So mixed up....

KRAKAR: That's all right, we'll chop it up into dates. Go ahead and tell about it because there are a very few people around still willing to talk about World War I. I've heard they were reduced to eating their own shoe leather.

JOHNSON: I've never heard that. My brother, until he was over there he had never smoked. And as soon as he returned he stopped smoking. And he didn't drink so he saved his money, whatever they were paid, he said. Many of the other soldiers, shortly after having been paid, were out of money. They would ask him for money; he always had a little purse with a little change in it. He would say he was sorry but he couldn't help them. He had his money in a money belt that he wore. When they arrived here on the east coast and they had to go through the delouser, you stripped your clothes and your shoes, everything. He put his money belt in the toe of one of his army shoes. He came out at the other end the same time as his shoes and clothes did so nobody ever knew that he had a belt full of money. /Laughter/

KRAKAR: Oh, he was a smarty and very frugile. Do you remember much about it in Chicago?

JOHNSON: Well, I know that it came to the point where they were about to take my husband.

MORSE: Even with his bad eyesight?

JOHNSON: The war didn't last that long.

MORSE: When the Armistice was signed, did they have parties or how did they act?

JOHNSON: And one of the organizations that did so much for the soldiers was the Salvation Army. Harry said they were right there with food and coffee for them when it was needed. He said it was the one association that really did much for the soldiers.

KRAKAR: Tell us what you did for entertainment at home as a child.

JOHNSON: Why, for what you call fun or light entertainment on a Sunday afternoon, my mother would go out with we children. We would gather up the broken tree branches and put them on our wood pile to add to our supply of wood. We would rake and straighten up and clean up the yard all around the house. When that was all in a neat order, she would let we girls come in the house and either make a pan of taffy or fudge or sometimes bake a large pan of cake. That, to us, meant recreation. And for my brothers, sometimes the neighbor boy came and they tumbled around in the hay loft, you know, in the hay.

MORSE: Did they play ball?

JOHNSON: I don't remember that they did.

MORSE: Do you recall any historical occasions that had a bearing on your early life?

JOHNSON: Not really historical. Now, I remember the test holes that were made by a geologist from Chicago which led to the strip mines.

MORSE: When was this?

JOHNSON: I don't know, because I was quite small when those men made the test holes.

MORSE: Do you remember anything about their visit?

JOHNSON: Yes, because they came and asked my mother if they could have a room and board at our house; and, of course, they had our guest bedroom, and my mother had to serve them three meals a day. One of the things she made for dessert (that we had often because we always had

plenty of milk and eggs) was custard pie. And this one man ate it and said to my mother, "What is this, it is so delicious?" We children couldn't imagine that there was anybody who didn't know what custard pie was.

MORSE: Do you remember the location of this farm they did the boring on or who's farm it was?

JOHNSON: Yes. It belonged to a man by the name of Warem Short. And it was in Felix Township.

MORSE: This was the forerunner of the strip mining that is now...

JOHNSON: Yes. The strip mining didn't come for many years later but that was a forerunner and that was the purpose of those test holes.

MORSE: I see.

JOHNSON: I have told you before that we were a family of ten children and I was the second eldest of the family. I liked music. We had an old square piano. My parents said that if I would stay at home and help mother to take care of those younger children that they would let me have piano lessons. My teacher was Miss Mary Holderman of Grundy County, Morris, Illinois. At one time she was the County Superintendent of Schools. One day when she came to give me a lesson, she said the report had just been received that an ocean passenger ship by the name of the Titanic had crashed against an iceberg and sank. I don't remember how many people drowned or how many survivors there were, but one of them who drowned was a very wealthy man by the name of John Jacob Astor. He had married a very young woman and his young bride was one of the survivors.

MORSE: What was her name?

JOHNSON: Oh, I don't really know. One sheet music that I learned to play (my two little brothers always begged me to play it), on the cover

of the sheet of music were a lot of young bears and the title of the sheet music was "The March of the Teddy Bears." When they would see me go to the piano, they would beg me to play "The March of the Teddy Bears." /Laughter/

MORSE: Did you entertain for the rest of the family on special occasions or...

JOHNSON: No. I never learned to play as well as that. It was more for my own interest and entertainment. I did learn how to read the keyboard and some of the basic things about music.

MORSE: Did you play Christmas carols?

JOHNSON: No. I don't remember that I played Christmas carols.

MORSE: Do you remember about Christmas when you were young?

JOHNSON: Oh yes, I can tell you all about our Christmas and it was much different than what the Christmas of children of today is. People didn't have Christmas trees then. What we did was, we hung stockings. We went to whatever drawer in the furniture that our clean clothes were kept in, took out a pair of clean stockings. They were cotton stockings, heavy cotton stockings. We would pin the two stockings together and hang them over the back of a chair, a straight chair. I have told you that we had a great deal of fruit in our orchard. But what we didn't have was citrus fruit. It was a real treat when an orange was put in one stocking at Christmas time, and a handful of mixed nuts. The other stocking was for whatever gifts we got. We had an aunt who always remembered us. I don't remember the gifts she gave to my brothers but my sisters and I always looked forward to receiving some new hair ribbon because we had long hair. My mother braided our hair. We had long, braided hair; and then she braided it either part way down or all the way down, and then tied each braid with a ribbon. For our

Christmas dinner, we were English people so we always had the English plum pudding. And you know how children look forward to something like that. So we had the real plum pudding as it was made in England, as the grandparents made it when they came to this country.

MORSE: Can you tell me how it was made?

JOHNSON: Oh, yes. I could but I think that is too much detail for something like this. But I can tell you it had to be boiled in white cloth in an iron kettle full of boiling water and that had to be kept boiling for several hours before the pudding was cooked. Then my mother made a delicious sauce to go over the pudding. There were so many of us, one chicken wouldn't do, so she roasted two chickens; and, of course, stuffed them with the sage dressing. We had potatoes and vegetables, but the plum pudding and roasted chicken and dressing were the highlights of our Christmas day.

MORSE: Did you have any special decorations other than the stockings in your home?

JOHNSON: We had no decorations then. Later people had cranberries and they glued together paper rings but that wasn't in my time.

MORSE: That was later?

JOHNSON: Yes.

MORSE: Do you remember your first Christmas tree? Were you a married woman then?

JOHNSON: Oh, I've got pictures of it in an album here. It was for my first daughter when she was ten months old. The tree, the stand, the lights, and the decorations was a total of $10 for that first tree.

MORSE: That was a live tree?

JOHNSON: That was a live tree. The tree itself was $2.50. So in my lifetime that was the first Christmas tree.

MORSE: That would have been what year?

JOHNSON: 1921.

MORSE: Can you tell about mining and strikes in the mines?

JOHNSON: I remember hearing, of course, (my father was never a miner. My father was an engineer.)

MORSE: Tell me about this strike, that you remember.

JOHNSON: I don't remember. I only remember having heard of it because my father and his brother who was older than him and their father and their grandfather in England were all hoisting engineers. They were never coal miners. But, I had other relatives who were coal miners.

MORSE: When was this strike?

JOHNSON: I was born in July of 1892 and it was before I was born.

MORSE: What was the strike about?

JOHNSON: Miners wanting a raise. When I was one year old they had the World's Fair, the 1893 fair in Chicago. An aunt of mine took care of me so that my father and mother could go up to the World's Fair of 1893. It was called the "Columbian Exhibition." Somewhere among my keepsakes I have an aluminum piece about the size of a silver dollar that is from the Columbian Exhibition. My mother told me of things, you know, that they saw and heard.

MORSE: Can you remember any that particularly impressed you?

JOHNSON: No, I don't. And. of course, my own husband and daughters and myself, we enjoyed the Century of Progress in 1933 and 1934 in Chicago.

MORSE: What do you remember most about that?

JOHNSON: Oh, there was just so much. It was beautiful, and it was interesting.

MORSE: It was a three-year exhibition?

JOHNSON: Two-year. And you as a nurse would have been very interested because, what is the proper pronunciation, embryo, a child before birth, fetus.

MORSE: I don't know the term and I have worked for eight years in obstetrics.

JOHNSON: You don't? It is what the form of a baby is before it is born. E-m-b-r-y-o. (pause) Yes, I mean the embryo or fetus they had them in glass containers up on the shelves there, from almost the time of conception until the time of birth.

MORSE: These were real?

JOHNSON: Real. Oh, yes.

MORSE: How did that impress your children at that time, they were young girls?

JOHNSON: Well, I don't remember anything about that. But, it was the first time that I, a mature woman, had ever seen anything of that sort.

MORSE: How did you feel? Many people become ill when they think of the fetus. You were just fascinated.

JOHNSON: I was just very interested.

MORSE: Can you tell about some of the exhibits?

JOHNSON: They had many things like you would see at a county fair and they had things that would interest people regardless of what your vocation was.

MORSE: Were there national areas of, were there areas of each state that were represented, or each region of the country?

JOHNSON: Oh, each state had their exhibit, but I don't remember their specialities, for each. Virginia and Eleanor and I went as often as

we could the two years that it was held, because, oh, there was just so much to be seen that you could cover so little ground on each trip.

MORSE: Where was it?

JOHNSON: On the lake front there in Chicago.

MORSE: Were there any permanent buildings built just for that exhibition that are now a part of Chicago.

JOHNSON: No, they were demolished but believe it or not there are some left there from the 1893 Columbian Exposition.

MORSE: Do you know which ones those are?

JOHNSON: I can't think fast enough to tell you.

MORSE: I think Lincoln Park was made a part of one of those exhibitions. Does that ring a bell?

JOHNSON: The only two that there would be would be 1893 and 1933.

MORSE: Do you remember anything about weather when you were a child, any severe weather?

JOHNSON: Oh, I can remember a terrible hailstorm in the middle of one summer and it took our crops, our grain, our fruit. It broke windows in our home and in the out buildings in the barn and other buildings; and oh, the corn stalks in the field were battered off, just little stubs were left as the corn came out of the ground. Down in the orchard, the apples were split all over the ground. When we went to the pasture to get the cows, there were the poor cows standing leg deep in water with hailstones still all over the top of the water. The had been so large and so many that the ice was there yet on the water in midsummer when we went to get those cows.

MORSE: Was there a good deal of rain with the hailstorm? Is that why the cattle was standing in water?

JOHNSON: Yes, yes. Rain and hail. Oh, everything was gone! It was just sickening to look into the fields and into the orchard.

MORSE: Do you remember how you managed through that winter? Did you have enough provisions left?

JOHNSON: I don't know because that was my parents responsibility and I was too young to remember.

MORSE: You mentioned once before in our conversation the seriosness of childhood and most of your experiences would tell us that your childhood was serious.

JOHNSON: Well, I'll tell you, being situated as I was, the second eldest, of ten children, I always helped with the younger children and as I look back over my childhood, I have the feeling that I never felt young. I always had so much responsibility; and of course, you know we were not wealthy. And so, to me, life has always been a very serious business. If you want me to add a little more to it, when my husband died of a heart attack, three months after his death I found employment in an insurance office because, although we had some savings, I didn't think that it would take care of me as long as I might live. And certainly, I wanted to be independent. I stayed on that job for 13 years and I didn't retire until I was 73. I never made application for Social Security until I was 72.

MORSE: I see, so you were actually 60 years of age before you ever went to work after you were married?

JOHNSON: Yes. And the last day that I was in the office, the big boss of that division took me out to luncheon. When we came back, the other workers were already settled down to work. They had been for fifteen minutes. He said to me, "Harriet, I bet this is the first time that you were ever late returning to your desk." In that 13 years he had

observed how I had worked.

MORSE: What did you start out when you first went to work and what did you finally end up, in what position?

JOHNSON: Oh, I never left that division. I gained responsibility, I was what they called mail recorder. I received the policies the agents had sold--recorded them and packaged them for others to work on. I also did the writings and filing when I had finished with the mail. I did any of the work that was done in that department.

MORSE: Do you have anything more you would like to tell us in this interview?

JOHNSON: There is so much over my lifetime that I could add but after all, I doubt that it would be of real value.

MORSE: Well, I thank you anyway for this beautiful interview. Its been great.

JOHNSON: Well, things have occured, you know. I never expected to be interviewed like this. So, I didn't have it prepared.

MORSE: That's the way they wanted it. They wanted it just spontaneous. The things that you remembered. The things that impressed you most. And they will glue them together, like I say, little parts of what you've told us and little parts of what somebody else has told on all of these subjects.

JOHNSON: Oh, yes.

MORSE: We thank you.

JOHNSON: You're welcome.

Back Row: Alfred Williamson, Harry Williamson

Front Row: Harriet Williamson Johnson (Interviewee), Harriet Williamson, Harriet Williamson (Originator of G-Shaft Candy)

Death notice from the Braidwood Weekly Republican, September 17, 1881.

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[illegible] left for Normal on Tuesday, to match her education.

On Tuesday Ed. Utley and Ross Goodrich left for Evanston, where they are attending school.

Sunday last Messrs. Peck and Smith and the Misses Delmarle and Goodrich, visited Miss Rankin in Morris, where the latter is attending school. The time spent was thoroughly enjoyed by all parties.

Mayor McLaughlin returned about 1 a. m. on Monday, and left in the evening of the same day for the south. He reports trade as good all over the country. The effects of the fires in Michigan he says, is much worse than can be imagined from the newspaper reports.

Phillip Phillips, the greatest living singer of sacred song, assisted by his son, will give a concert at the Presbyterian church, in this city, on Saturday evening Oct. 15th. Braidwood is very fortunate in securing Mr. Phillips' services. This is the only point he stops at between Chicago and Carlinville.

The position of inspector of mines for Will county will shortly be vacant. This post is a most important one, and deserves more than passing notice from the press in a city so much interested in all that pertains to mines and mining as Braidwood is. Few if any will deny that this position can be better and more efficiently filled by a practical miner than by an outsider. Among the candidates for the coming vacancy is Evan D. Phillips, a thoroughly practical man, and one who upon the death of Mr. Morris, completed the term of the deceased, with satisfaction to all concerned. As many lives and a vast amount of property in a measure depend upon the proper discharge of the duties of mine inspector, we trust that this matter will be carefully weighed by the Supervisors.

In our last issue we announced with regret, the death of William Williamson, engineer at 1 shaft. This sad end was the result of accident, caused by carpenters removing the supporting beams from the arched roof of the engine house, which fell in, burying the deceased in the ruins. Williamson received every attention that medical skill could divise, but died the same evening (Sept. 9th). The funeral took place on Sunday at 2 p. m., and was of a most respectable character. Williamson was born in Yorkshire, and came to this country in 1866; he settled at first in Iowa, but his health not agreeing with the close confinement of the machine shop, in which he had found employment, he left and came to Braidwood in 1872, where he remained with the C., W. & V. until his untimely death. Mr. Williamson was a good living man, who paid every attention to his family. He was a good engineer, and well liked by all who knew him. He leaves a wife and six sons, the eldest a smart lad of 10 years.

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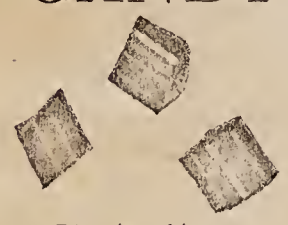

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